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SWAMP SOCCER & SNOW SOCCER – WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Case: Attracting Norwegian customers

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ABSTRACT

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The commissioner of this thesis is Ski&Sport resort Ukkohalla-Paljakka Oy, located in Hyrynsalmi, who arranges two special sports events every year: Swamp soccer and Snow soccer – World Championships. The primary objective of this thesis is to find out how to attract and to connect to possible new participants from abroad as well as how the events should be implemented and marketed. Target country was selected to be Norway, as Norwegians are a potential customer group for these events. The second purpose of this thesis is to find out which digital marketing channels would be the most beneficial in terms of attracting and acquiring new customers.

Theoretical framework covers adventure tourism, today's experience economy and the main target group of the events, the millennials. Also, social media platforms and trends in digital marketing in tourism are introduced. The research for this thesis is conducted by using literary sources, websites, reports and articles. The empirical part is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods as it was conducted in a form of a semi-structured online survey.

The results from the survey give beneficial suggestions for the commissioner on how to market and implement their events. Additionally, the results offer proposals on how to use and develop their digital marketing in social media, as well as which platforms and ways of marketing they should focus on to attract Norwegian customers.

In the future it could be researched whether Ukkohalla's digital marketing operations were working and if the awareness of the events has increased among Norwegians. It could also be interesting to study this kind of research targeting different customer group for example from a different country to see if the results would differ. Additionally, to further develop Ukkohalla's events and digital marketing, it could be beneficial to benchmark similar kind of events.

Keywords: adventure tourism, digital marketing, social media, tourism

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the recent years, globalization has changed tourism industry and tourist behavior in many ways – consumers are increasingly seeking for authentic experiences and one tourism segment that has risen above several other segments is adventure tourism. Nowadays, there is a high demand for experience-based holidays where tourists can learn and interact with local population and do something they could not do in their own, everyday surroundings (UNWTO, 2014. Cited 10.3.2018). To survive the competition in this tourism segment, companies and destinations are forced to develop, design and promote their services with the emphasis on the consumer experience (Pine, B. & Gilmore, J. 1998, 99). It also provides a possibility for the companies to differentiate themselves from others and to emphasize the uniqueness of their businesses.

Furthermore, nowadays it is more of a rule than an exception that people look for inspiration and information about their next holidays on the internet and social media, which is why it is important for tourism companies to reach their target group online. It is a must for companies to gather data about their customers and the customer behavior as the industry is highly competitive and no-one can afford to lose customers because of poor digital marketing.

The commissioner for this thesis is Ski&Sport Resort Ukkohalla-Paljakka Oy, located in eastern Finland. Ukkohalla offers a wide range of authentic tourist experiences all year round: events, sports, well-being and nature experiences in harmony with the surrounding nature. Every year they arrange two unique sports events that attract adventurous tourists from all parts of the world – Snow Soccer & Swamp Soccer – World Championships.

The event organizer sees potential in these special events to be even more international and bigger, which is the reason this thesis topic and research over the adventure tourism was much needed. The primary purpose of this thesis is to find out how to attract and to connect to possible new participants from abroad as well as how the events should be implemented and marketed. To narrow down the research area, a target country was selected to be Norway, as Norwegians are a potential customer group for these events. The second purpose of this thesis is to find out which digital marketing channels would be the most beneficial from the customers' point of view. From these research problems, the research questions were formulated with the help of the commissioner to be as follows:

1. How to connect with and to attract possible new participants from Norway?
2. Which digital marketing channels to use as marketing tools?

In the first part of this thesis the commissioner and the events under the research are introduced. The theoretical framework of this thesis covers adventure tourism and all characteristics related to it that are relevant for this research. At first, adventure tourism is defined, and a brief overview of the industry is introduced. Additionally, information about the target group – millennials - and today's experience economy is provided, and the concept of experience is explained by using existing models. After that digital marketing in tourism is explained through digital customer journey from the customer experience point of view and several digital marketing communication tools are introduced. Also, today's trends in digital marketing in tourism are presented. The target consumer group is chosen to be Norwegians, which is why Norwegian traveler profiles and reasons traveling to Finland are introduced.

The research for this thesis is conducted by using literary sources, websites, reports and articles. The empirical part is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods, as a semi-structured online survey was conducted to gain the needed theoretical background and real-life examples. The survey was answered by Norwegian sports enthusiasts and athletes who are potential customers for Snow soccer & Swamp Soccer – World Championships. Additionally, the author had informants from the commissioner company, which helped to better understand the history and the concepts of the events.

Lastly, the findings and the results of the survey are introduced and compared with the theoretical framework. Conclusions are discussed in the final part of the thesis. The findings of the theory and the survey provide new information and development suggestions for the commissioner company regarding their events and their digital marketing operations. The recommended development proposals are based on the thesis research and its findings.

2 BACKGROUND

The following chapter provides background information about the commissioner of this thesis and about the two special events that are under research. Brief history of the events is also introduced to better understand the concept and nature of the events.

2.1 The commissioner: Ski&Sport Resort Ukkohalla-Paljakka Oy

The commissioner of this thesis is Ski&Sport Resort Ukkohalla-Paljakka, which is located in Hyrynsalmi, a small municipality in eastern Finland. Ukkohalla has been operating since 1988, which means this year it is their 30th birthday (Ukkohalla, 2018a. Cited 6.3.2018). The goal of the company is to become one of Finland's ten largest ski resorts by 2020, and a lot of investments have been made over the recent years to widen the business. Ukkohalla has an excellent potential to achieve this goal as it is a great place for tourists: it is open all year round with diverse summer and winter activities. (Ukkohalla, 2018b. Cited 6.3.2018.)

Beautiful lake scenery, unique ancient woodlands and snow-proof slopes during the winter set the stage for a wide range of adventure and activity tourism that cannot be experienced anywhere else than in authentic Finnish nature. Ukkohalla's activity offering includes for example cable wakeboarding, hiking, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowmobile rides and snowshoeing (Ukkohalla, 2018a. Cited 6.3.2018).

Just like many other destinations, Ukkohalla has a wide online presence and they are using many digital marketing channels to market their business. They have a well-designed website in Finnish, English and Russian where information about their offerings is available and booking holidays is easy. In their website, both Swamp soccer & Snow Soccer – World Championships are stated as their main events. Ukkohalla is also present in several social media platforms, which are introduced later in this report.

2.2 Swamp soccer & Snow soccer – World Championships

A lot of theme weekends and events are being held in Ukkohalla, and every year there are two special sports events that attract a lot of tourists around the world: World Championships for Swamp soccer, held in July, and Snow soccer, held in February. Swamp soccer – World championships is organized together by the municipality of Hyrynsalmi and Ski&Sport resort Ukkohalla, whereas Snow soccer – World Championships is organized only by Ukkohalla. (Kempainen, E-L., 2013, 25.)

It all began in 1997 when a local cross-country skier wanted to try something new as a summer training method. He took a normal football and his friends to the swamp and the rest is history. The first Finnish championships were held in 1998 and the next year the event expanded and around 50 teams were competing in European championships. Swamp soccer rapidly gained interest among people around the world and in 2000 it was time for the first Swamp soccer – World Championships. Since then, the number of teams has increased and nowadays there are some 150-200 teams competing every year. This two-day event is played in several different series from which everyone can select a preferable way to experience the World Championships: hobby, competition, mixed, business, masters and adventure series. (Suopotkupallo.fi, 2018. Cited 15.3.2018.)



Figure 1. Swamp Soccer - World Championships 2014 (Ukkohalla, 2018a)

It is safe to say that swamp soccer was invented in Hyrnsalmi, which is a major competitive advantage compared to other swamp soccer tournaments arranged around the world. In addition to the football matches, there are other activities arranged in the swamp area during the weekend as well. Swamp Run is a muddy obstacle track that challenges adventurous participants with balancing, crawling, jumping in tires, mud bath, etc. After the matches participants can relax in the Finnish sauna and freshen up in the lake. In the evenings it is time for Swamp Rock, where people can enjoy live music, good company and sports festival atmosphere in the middle of beautiful Finnish nature. (Suopotkupallo.fi, 2018. Cited 15.3.2018; Kemppainen, E-L., 2018.)

Snow soccer – World Championships is a slightly smaller event, but it has also gained international interest and grown over the years to be one of the main events in Ukkohalla during winter season. The rules are the same as in swamp soccer, but all the games in the tournament are played on one day and the series only include men's, women's and mixed. The first World Championships were played in 2002 and this year, in 2018, there were 41 teams competing of which 10 were from Russia (Ukkohalla, 2018c). The author participated the event this year with her football team and got the pleasure to experience the atmosphere of this unique sports competition and feel the sense of community with other adventure-loving people around and outside Finland.

Target group for both events is 18 – 40-year-old adventurous people who want to have fun and experience these crazy sports in the middle of Finnish nature. The events are also suitable option for companies who want to offer their personnel and stakeholders unforgettable experiences. The main target area for the events is Scandinavia and Europe, although there have been teams participating from the other parts of the world as well. For the coming Swamp soccer & Snow soccer – Championships it is realistic and reasonable to get a few new teams to join but the events have potential to expand by tens of new teams in the future as the swamp area is huge and Ukkohalla has the resources needed. (Kemppainen, E-L., 2018.)

3 ADVENTURE TOURISM

In this chapter adventure tourism and relevant characteristics related to it are described. A brief overview of adventure travel market is introduced to better understand the concept of adventure tourism, and the nature of today's experience economy is explained. Also, the influencers of the experience economy and the biggest customer group of adventure tourism, the millennials, are introduced.

3.1 Defining adventure tourism

Adventure tourism can be hard to define as it is subjective, and it has many levels in it; what seems an adventure for one, can be totally normal for someone else. However, Adventure Travel Trade Association defines adventure tourism as a trip that includes at least two of the following three elements: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion. Although two of these elements is enough to fill the definition of adventure tourism, trips that succeed to offer the traveler all three parts tend to give the fullest adventure travel experience. Swamp soccer – World Championships is a good example of an event that includes all three components:

1. Physical activity: playing swamp soccer
2. Natural environment: swamp area, Finnish ancient woodlands
3. Cultural immersion: the sports was invented in Hyrynsalmi, interaction with the locals

Within adventure tourism, there are two main adventure activity categories: soft adventure and hard adventure. Soft adventure includes activities that seem safe to most people and do not require special skills or experience but still involve discovering new things and stretching comfort zones. Both swamp soccer and snow soccer fall into this category. Hard adventure activities, on the other hand, are physically demanding, risky and challenging, and include sports such as mountain climbing, trekking and caving. Additionally, adventure tourism is defined as travel outside a person's everyday environment for more than 24 hours but not more than one subsequent year. Adventure tourism can be both domestic or international. (UNWTO, 2014. Cited 10.3.2018.)

3.2 Adventure travel market

Due to global tourism growth and people seeking new experiences and destinations, the adventure travel market is one travel segment that has expanded the most within the last decade. In a survey conducted by Adventure Travel Trade Association, it was examined that in 2012 the percentage of international adventure travelers was 41,9, whereas in 2009 it was only 26,3. Any respondent who cited an adventure activity as their main activity of their last trip was considered as adventure traveler. According to the research the average age of an adventure traveler is 36 years old, 57% being male and 43% female. Over the recent years there has been a shift in preferred adventure activities, as nowadays adventure travelers prefer experiencing new cultures and other soft adventures over risky adrenaline activities. Due to this, many travel companies have established “easier” tours, such as food and wine tasting tours as well as local market visits, to meet the needs of most of the consumers. (ATTA, 2013. Cited 16.3.2018; Shabada, L. 2018. Cited 29.4.2018.)

What it comes to Finland as an adventure travel destination, it has a wide selection of activities throughout the year for tourists to choose from. In 2016, out of 28 developed countries, Finland was ranked as the 8th best country for adventure travel considering the following ten aspects: government policies, sustainable development, safety and security, health, natural and cultural resources, tourism infrastructure, entrepreneurship, adventure activity resources and brand. (ATTA, 2016. Cited 16.3.2018.)

3.3 Customers seeking for experiences

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when mass production and mass markets ruled the economy, consumers had similar attitudes and tastes and they demanded products and services at low price. Due to this customer behavior, producers and service providers offered products and services that appealed to majority of the population, such as package holidays. (Reisinger, Y. 2009, 10.)

Today's consumers have generated new viewpoints and are exposed to different cultures because of globalization and development of communication technology. This experience-seeking economy has led people to book trips independently rather than buying package holidays. Nowadays people are no longer satisfied with just laying on a beach or shopping and they seek experiences that

emphasize the natural and cultural assets that make a destination unique compared to others. Today's populations are settled in metropolises and many citizens want to travel away from the lights and noises of big cities. Going on 'an adventure' is often associated with exceeding oneself; doing something that a person would not dare to do in his or her everyday life. At its best, experiences can lead to person's individual improvement that changes the person's way of living. (Kylänen, M. & Tarssanen, S. 2009, 11.)

3.4 The millennials

One key customer segment that has widely contributed to the change of customer behavior in the international tourism industry is the millennials. Millennials are typically defined as young adults born between the early 1980s and 2000s. These so called 'modern tourists' want authentic, flexible and personalized travel experiences, and service providers need to find ways how satisfy these needs. This first global generation wants to experience new cultures, blend experiences across different types of trips, encounter and engage with local people and have genuine experiences that offer adrenaline-rushes. Out of all outbound trips done in Europe in 2015, European millennials covered up to one third, which makes them a rather sizeable market segment. The size of this travel group has rapidly grown, and it has become one of the most important groups not only in adventure tourism, but also in the whole international travel industry and it is expected to grow every year. (ITB Berlin, 2016. Cited 21.3.2018.)

Furthermore, a big difference that millennials have compared to other generations is the knowledge and expertise in the usage of modern technology. Millennials are born in a technology advanced world and many millennials are so called 'smartphone addicts' and require free and fast Wi-Fi connection at all times. Nowadays, at least for millennials, traveling and communication go together, and the majority is embracing internet and mobile technology before, during and after travels. Destinations should aim at incorporating digital marketing tools as part of their marketing strategies and offering seamless travel experiences by using technology to simplify their offerings and experiences. According to a study conducted by ITB Berlin (2016), millennials are also happy to share their personal data for example in mobile applications to create individual travel experiences.

Additionally, young people are important word-of-mouth advertisers for destinations as they are a customer group that is most likely to share pictures and videos of their travels on their social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Pinterest and YouTube, and so increase the awareness of the destinations among people around the world. In fact, 9 out of 10 travelers read online reviews and think that those affect their decision-making process. Up to 95% trust tour and activity reviews on third party sites, such as TripAdvisor, as those reviews are seen more subjective than the reviews for example on destinations' website. (Stride Travel, 2016. Cited 27.3.2018.)

3.5 The experience economy

Due to this change in customer behavior, a dominant trend in the service industry has been the concept of using 'experiences' for purposes of marketing and branding. To success and to add more value to their offering, service providers are forced to find ways how to emotionally and personally connect with the consumers and how to provide them with the conceptions of experience and emotion. This has led people to describe today's economy as the 'experience economy'. In addition to consumers' changed consumption patterns, other factors supporting this economy include new technology and people's common need for caring, excitement and entertainment. (Getz, D. 2007, 172.)

The concept of the experience economy was first introduced in the book *The Experience Economy* by Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore in 1998, and the models introduced in it have been quoted and utilized ever since. The book discusses the progression of economic value and how it has developed over the time as seen in the *Figure 2.* on the page 15 – from providing undifferentiated commodities to making priced goods, and from delivering services to staging differentiated experiences. An easy example to better understand this model would be, for example, the progression of economic value of coffee: from selling coffee beans to grounded coffee sold in packages in supermarkets, and from a cup of coffee served in a café to experiencing a special coffee in Starbucks in a pleasant environment. Nowadays consumers are also willing to pay extra for services that offer added value to their experiences, which is one factor that has supported the switch from service economy to experience economy.

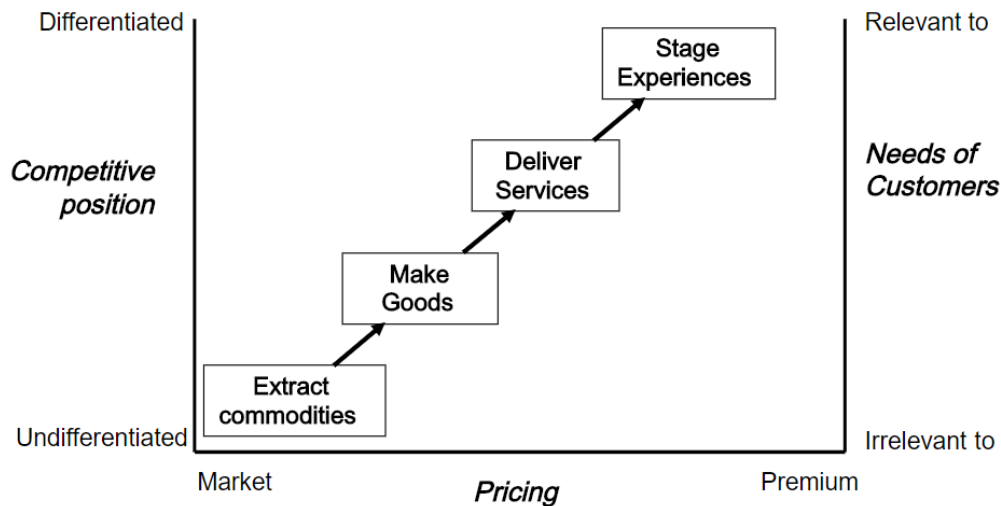


Figure 2. The progression of economic value (Pine, B. & Gilmore, J. 1998, 98)

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998, 102), experiences can be categorized according to four realms of experience, as seen in Figure 3. below. Experiences can be divided according to physical participation level (passive participation – active participation), as well as mental participation level (absorption – immersion). As an example, experiences that offer low physical and mental participation tend to be entertaining, whereas experiences that offer high physical participation and low mental participation tend to be educational. However, some experiences don't necessarily follow this pattern, as educational experiences can amuse just as well as entertaining experiences and vice versa. To better understand the categorization, examples of all four kinds of experiences can be seen in Figure 3. below, including the events under research of this thesis topic.

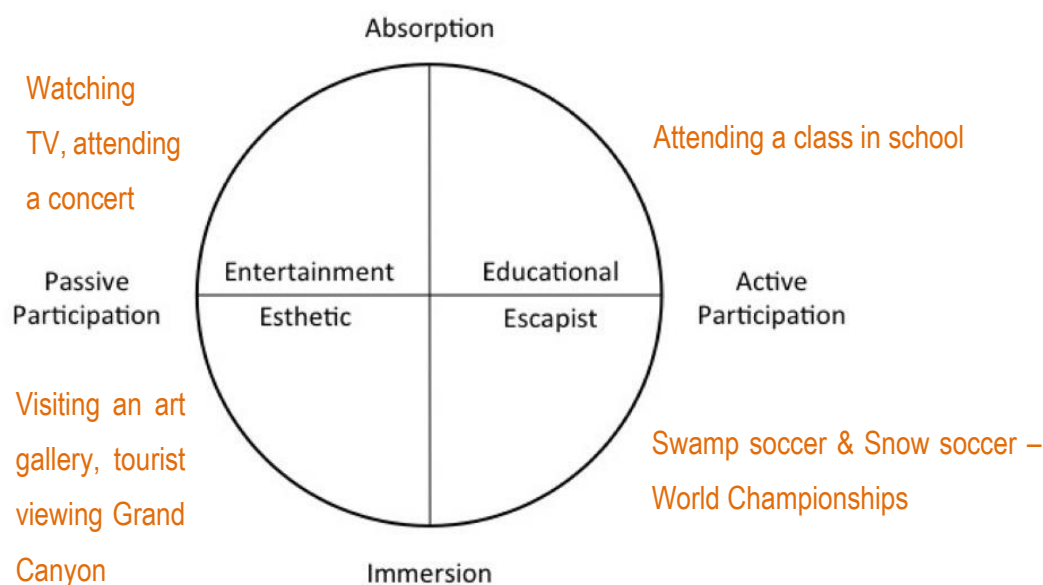


Figure 3. The four realms of experience (Pine, B. & Gilmore, J. 1998, 102)

The elements of an experience include uniqueness, authenticity, theme, engagement of several senses, contrast and interaction, and in a perfect experience all these elements are represented. In the end, experiences are personal and subjective and therefore cannot be guaranteed. However, in a tourism industry destinations and service providers can have a huge effect on their customers' experiences for example via customer service. (Kylänen, M. & Tarssanen, S. 2009, 10.)

4 DIGITAL MARKETING IN TOURISM

Due to new digital technology and its importance to today's consumers, it has become a must for tourism destinations to be present online and use digital marketing to reach their potential customers. Simply put, digital marketing is achieving marketing objectives through use of digital technologies and media. Digital marketing, also known as online marketing or e-marketing, covers all different promotional tools executed via digital technology – such as internet, mobile, TV and radio. Tools within internet and mobile include e-mails, blogs, search engines, websites and social media, to name a few. These tools are beneficial for companies of all size and even the smaller firms with fewer marketing resources can use them to raise the awareness of their business. Benefits of using digital marketing include global reach, low costs and ability to personalize the marketing, which are the main reasons why the use of traditional marketing channels, such as newspaper and magazines, has decreased. With digital marketing the whole world is the market and everyone with an Internet connection is the audience. (Smart Insights, 2018. Cited 28.3.2018; Techopedia, 2018. Cited 22.3.2018.)

4.1 Digital customer journey in tourism

Whereas earlier people could walk straight into a travel agency, read a couple of brochures and book their trip on the spot, nowadays nearly all travel related search and booking happens online (Gonzalo, F. 2015. Cited 17.4.2018). Tourism is one of the industries that is the most affected by digital development and to survive the competition, destinations need to appeal to consumers in every stage of customers' digital customer journey to make them interested and to convince their customers why they should choose them over the competitors.

There are a few commonly recognized stages in a travelers' online decision-making process: inspiration, planning and comparing, purchasing, travel and post-travel stage, as seen in *Figure 4.* on page 18. Nowadays consumers not only go online to compare and look for inspiration and information about their possible next travel destination, but they also compare travel destination options, book their holidays online and after the trip they go online to write reviews and recommendations for their fellow travelers. However, not all travelers go through all these stages

as some travelers do not go online to share their travel experiences, and spontaneous travelers do not necessarily need much planning before their travels. (Gonzalo, F. 2015. Cited 16.4.2018.)

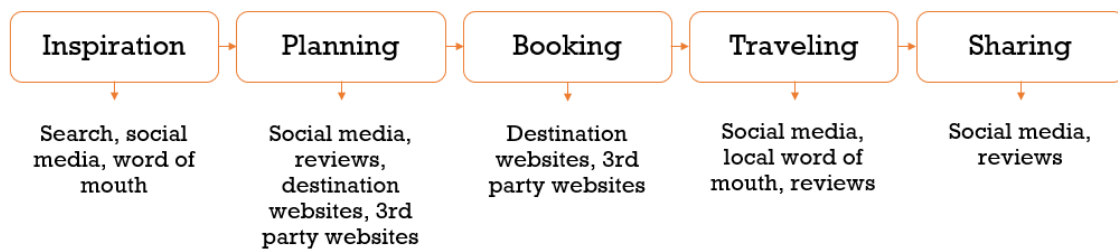


Figure 4. Digital customer journey

Even between every stage there are several moments when consumer must make decisions, which is why it is crucial for anyone in tourism industry to know how their customers behave and to be there for them in every stage of the customer journey. Due to this digital era we are living in, today's consumers are better informed, more demanding because of the quantity of information, and will easily jump between sites at any point because having so many options. This means that travelers' digital customer journey is by no means a straight-forward "funnel", but more of a network where the movement happens smoothly back and forth and where consumers can jump into at every stage of the process. (Saut, R. 2015. Cited 17.4.2018; Tursas, S. 2018. Cited 17.4.2018.)

4.2 Trends in digital marketing in tourism

Even though marketing on the internet is diverse and can be easily personalized, there are some common trends that companies and service providers are using to make the most of their digital marketing operations and to better appeal to their customers. These trends are useful also from the customers' point of view as they are more engaging and offer easier ways of searching for information. The trends are introduced in the following paragraphs.

Mobile optimization. Over the recent years, one key aspect in travel industry has been mobile optimization. For a destination, being online is just as important as being mobile optimized, as the use of mobile devices in travel research and booking has increased dramatically within the last years. In fact, whereas in 2008 around 50% of consumers booked flights and hotels through travel agencies, in 2017 only 8% exploited travel agencies and the rest used desktop or mobile when booking their trips. (Visit Finland, 2017. Cited 30.3.2018; Gonzalo, F. 2017a. Cited 17.4.2018.)

Paid Facebook advertisements. Nowadays Facebook has around 1,3 million active daily users, which means it is quite crowded when it comes to companies advertising and marketing. Because of this, Facebook has established an algorithm that filters the organic posts on a company's own Facebook-page and those are less likely to show on any users' newsfeed. Due to this filter, it has been estimated that we only see around 300 posts on any given day, out of 2000+ possible ones. In practice this means that many travel destinations, as well as a company in any other industry, have been forced to use some of their marketing resources in paid Facebook ads to be more visible and reach their potential customers. (Gonzalo, F. 2017b. Cited 2.5.2018.)

Influencer marketing. A rather new trend in digital marketing is using influencers, such as celebrities, athletes or bloggers, to get a company's message heard for wider audience. Travel destinations can also benefit from collaborating with influencers as it offers a more authentic voice to resonate with the target customers. Most millennials are highly influenced by the recommendations of their peers in buying decisions, which supports the use of influencer marketing. (Bezborodova, E. 2018. Cited 2.5.2018; Gonzalo, F. 2017b. Cited 2.5.2018.)

Voice search. In 2017, 20% of all mobile search came from vocal queries and by 2020 they are expected to reach the total of 50%. More and more people find it easier for example to use Google Voice Search, Amazon Echo or Apple's Siri rather than typing on a computer or smartphone. This is when search engine optimization (SEO) and paid Google advertisements play a big part as travel destinations need to make sure that they are visible on consumers search results. In the future voice searches are expected to get more transactional as they will allow booking and conversions using only voice. (Gonzalo, F. 2017b. Cited 2.5.2018; Sterling, G. 2016. Cited 2.5.2018.)

Video content. Videos are by no means new in digital marketing, but it is still one of the most powerful ways to get your messages through. Especially in travel industry the use of videos in marketing is a great tool to tell your story and emotionally engage with the consumer. In fact, majority of consumers would rather watch a video to learn about a product or destination than read a text, which is why Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and SnapChat have started embracing video content. (Gonzalo, F. 2015. Cited 2.5.2018; Bezborodova, E. 2018. Cited 2.5.2018.)

4.3 Social media platforms

To narrow down the digital marketing in this thesis research, the focus is on social media since it offers the best channels for the case company to connect with their target group – the millennials. Social media contains all websites and mobile phone-based applications that enable people to participate in social networking by creating and sharing content. An important aspect, as the name *social media* suggests, is the interactive presence which allows individuals to participate in conversations with others. Millennials are the biggest user group of social media and out of all generations, they are most likely to use it before, during and after their travels. Social media allows them to share opinions and travel experiences, join the conversations and engage with others and the destination in real time. It is important for a destination to update their social media accounts and share information regularly as it increases trust towards the business among consumers. Nowadays consumers also expect customer service via social media by getting real-time responses from the companies. However, before investing too much time and effort on any digital marketing channel, companies should know their goals and their target group to make the most of their online presence. (Georgiou, M. 2014. Cited 26.3.2018; Mangan, M. 2015. Cited 26.3.2018.)

Social media channels that have the largest number of active users include Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, which is why they offer the best marketing platforms for destinations to market their offerings (Kallas, P. 2018. Cited 2.5.2018). Nowadays it is beneficial for destinations, as well as any other businesses, to be present in these social platforms because those offer the best marketing channels to reach their customers at low cost. In the following chapters these most relevant social media channels in tourism industry are introduced from the customers' and businesses' point of view. Other well-known social media platforms, such as TripAdvisor, LinkedIn, Twitter and Google+ were left without closer investigation since Ukkohalla's target group is not the biggest user group in these platforms or the platforms are not commonly used in travel industry, and therefore are not of high relevance in this research.

4.3.1 Facebook

Facebook, founded in 2004, has grown to be the most known social networking site. With over 2 billion monthly users worldwide, Facebook is the biggest and the most used social media platform. Its mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.

Facebook is free to join and use, and it allows people to share content, stay connected with friends and family and follow companies and people that they are interested. Almost 30% of the users are 25 – 34 years old, which is the most common age demographic that many businesses state as their target group, and up to 42% of marketers report that Facebook is important for their business. (Facebook Newsroom, 2018. Cited 2.4.2018; Zephoria, 2018. Cited 2.4.2018.)

Ukkohalla has a Facebook-page for the resort (*Ukkohalla Ski&Sport resort*) as well as its own page for swamp soccer (*Swamp soccer*), where information about snow soccer is also available. Additionally, Ukkohalla creates an event every year for both Swamp soccer & Snow soccer – World Championships where people can attend and follow the latest news and find information about the up-coming events.

4.3.2 Instagram

Another good networking and marketing channel in social media is picture and video sharing platform Instagram. It enables users to take pictures and edit them with several different filters, share pictures and videos, as well as to comment others' content and have conversations with people and businesses worldwide. Since it was founded in 2010, the number of profiles has increased every year and today Instagram has over 800 million active monthly users and 500 million active daily users. Most Instagram users are between 18 – 29 years old, which is also the most common age range to share pictures or videos from their travels as well as to look for travel inspiration. (Word Stream, 2018. Cited 3.4.2018.)

People using Instagram, also referred to as *Instagrammers*, feel that browsing pictures gives a more genuine feeling of the destination compared, for example, to a tourism brochure or other commercial travel guides. Many businesses, destinations included, have noticed the effectiveness of Instagram as a marketing tool as there are over 250 million business profiles using it worldwide. The key for businesses is to create sincere pictures of themselves and share visually attractive, high-quality pictures to gain awareness and customer engagement. (National Geographic Traveler, 2017. Cited 3.4.2018; Word Stream, 2018. Cited 3.4.2018.)

Ukkohalla has four Instagram accounts with visually-attractive pictures: for the resort (*@ukkohallaresort*), Wake park (*@ukkohalla_wakepark*), Snow park (*@snowpark_ukkohalla*) and

for Russian tourists (@ukkohallaru). However, Swamp soccer & Snow soccer – World Championships are not clearly presented in any of these accounts and basically people can find information about this event only by searching other people's pictures from the events. This is something Ukkohalla could improve in their future digital marketing operations.

4.3.3 YouTube

YouTube is the most known video sharing platform in social media and it has over 1,5 billion monthly active users. It enables users to upload, share, watch and comment videos and it is the second biggest search engine right after Google. As well as in social media platforms introduced above, it is free to use and the biggest user group in YouTube is the millennials. (Aslam, S. 2018. Cited 3.4.2018.)

In travel industry, videos have grown to play an important role in shaping a destinations' image and videos are also something consumers expect to see when looking for inspiration and information over the internet. Videos have become a big part of traveler's customer journey and it is important for destinations and other businesses to seize their opportunity. Destinations are selling experiences, emotions and feelings and videos are the best mediums to pass them on. (Torres, C. 2016. Cited 3.4.2018.)

In YouTube, Ukkohalla has an official account (*Ukkohalla-Paljakka Finland*) but it only has four subscribers, which shows that they haven't used the full potential of YouTube as a marketing channel. Ukkohalla has shared only a few videos in total, including introduction videos of Snow soccer and Swamp soccer – World Championships, Ski-In village and their downhill skiing slopes. However, there are several videos shared by tourists and other users about Ukkohalla and its offering from where people can get a clear picture of the destination.

5 NORWEGIAN TRAVELER PROFILES

The target customer group for this thesis was chosen to be Norwegian millennials, as they are potential participants for Swamp Soccer & Snow Soccer – World Championships. There have been teams from Norway participating in the events over the past years and the event organizer would like to have more Norwegians to join the crazy sports and to enjoy the atmosphere and Finnish nature.

This chapter provides information about Norwegians' reasons behind visiting Finland and about visitor profiles – who they are, what they are interested in and what they have experienced during their trips to Finland. Also, Norwegians' way of behaving online when planning and booking their holidays is introduced.

5.1 Norwegian visitors in Finland

Whereas Finns travel to Norway because of their beautiful and unique nature and culture, so do Norwegians travel to Finland. According to a research conducted by VisitFinland (2016), Norway is the 10th most important market for Finland by the number of overnight stays, average duration of the trip being 2,8 nights. Out of these overnights 60% was within summer and 40% within winter, which indicates that Norwegians appreciate both seasons and find something to travel for all year round.

However, as seen in the *Figure 5.* on the page 24, the single most popular month for Norwegians to visit Finland was July, covering up to a quarter of all overnight stays during the whole year. One of the reasons for this might be because July is the most common month for summer holidays and people have time to travel, as well as the fact that during summer the Finnish nature is at its best and there are plenty of things to do and to enjoy around the whole country.

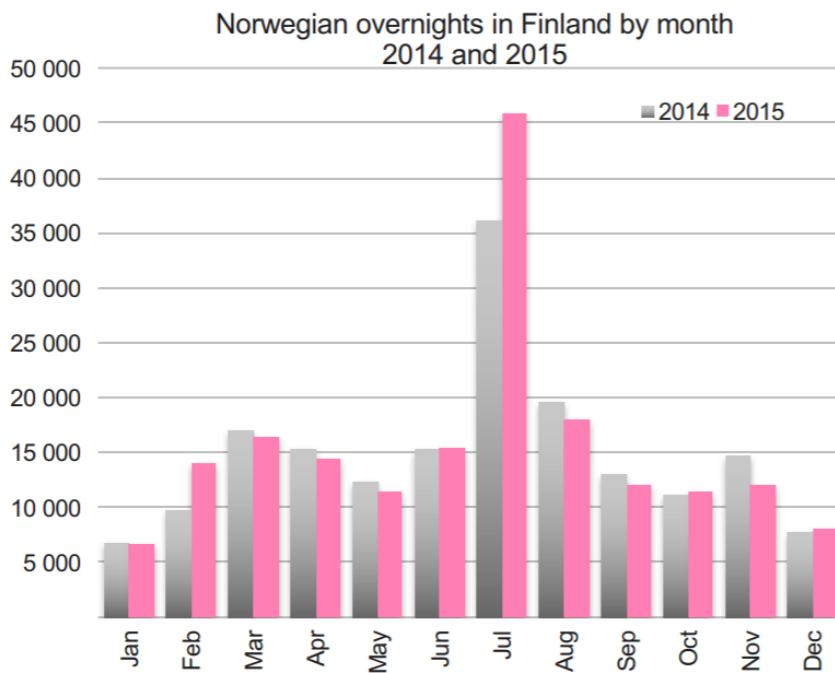


Figure 5. Norwegian overnights in Finland by month 2014 and 2015 (VisitFinland, 2016)

To better understand the target customer group, it is also important to acknowledge the reasons behind the visits to Finland. For almost half (45%) of the Norwegian travelers visiting Finland, the reason of the stay was a business trip. A quarter of the trips to Finland were visits to friends or relatives, a fifth were leisure trips and the rest was stated as other trips including studies, tours, etc. (VisitFinland, 2016. Cited 17.3.2018.)

Another factor supporting Norwegians being a suitable target group for the events under research is that when in Finland, Norwegians spend 71% on services and 29% on products (VisitFinland, 2016. Cited 17.3.2018). This suggests that Norwegians in general tend to invest in experiences and activities rather than commodities. In fact, activities and experiences that Norwegians are the most interested in or have already experienced in Finland include summer activities on water, summer activities on land, Finnish cultural attractions and Finnish sauna – all of them being something that can be found from Ukkohalla.

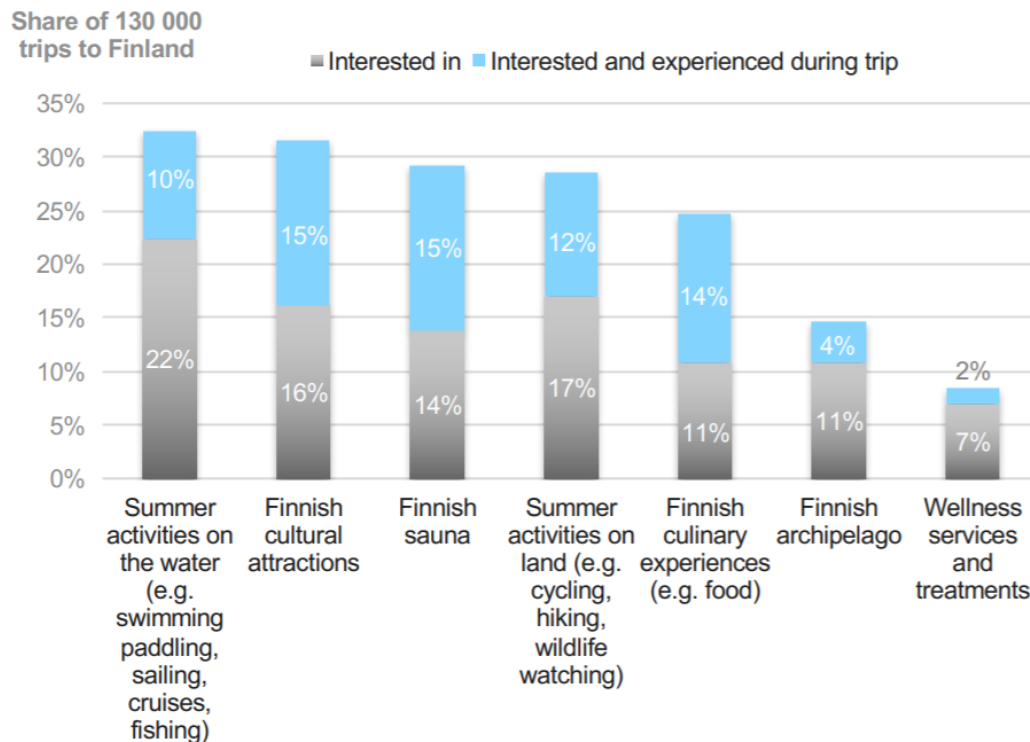


Figure 6. Norwegians' interests and experiences in Finland (VisitFinland, 2016)

From the Figure 6. above it can be seen that on top of the experiences and activities already mentioned, Norwegians are also interested in Finnish culinary experiences and wellness services and treatments. These are also something that Ukkohalla can offer as they have a restaurant serving delicious dishes, as well as SaunaWorld&Spa with gym, outdoor and indoor pools, outdoor and indoor saunas, jacuzzi, massages and much more.

5.2 Norwegian travelers' online behavior

Due to new technology and development of computer and mobile gadgets, consumers have replaced travel agencies with online booking sites when booking their holidays. Whether it is a spontaneous weekend getaway or a trip around the world, online is the first 'destination' for most travelers. When in need for immediate answers, travelers tend to turn to their mobile devices, which is why it is important for the destinations and service providers to have mobile friendly websites and important information visible also in mobile devices.

According to a research conducted by TNS (2017), up to 81% of Norwegian travelers go online at some point of their customer journey, for example when planning or when booking their trip. If travelers fail to search for information, compare prices or book the trip with mobile device and need

to switch to another device, it can be harmful to the business. Not only it causes extra work for the traveler, it is also a risk for the destination to lose a customer. Still in 2016, many air travelers had to use two or more devices in the stages leading up to the purchase: 46% in inspiration stage, 22% in researching stage, 16% in price comparison stage and 8% in the booking and purchasing stage. Other travel categories that Norwegians had poor mobile experiences with, in addition to air travel, included vacation rentals and vacation packages. The research suggests that much is still to be done to improve the features and usability of mobile websites and applications.

Additionally, surveys conducted by Statista (2017a, 2017b) show that 99% of Norwegians aged 16 – 34 years old use social media of some sort and up to 65% of these users use social media daily or almost daily. This indicates that Ukkohalla's target group and the target group under investigation in this research spends a lot of time online, which is why Ukkohalla should invest time, and money if required, on marketing in different social media platforms to gain awareness and customer engagement.

However, being online as such is not enough for travel providers as it is also important to appear in a certain manner and to be able to show what you have to offer. Nowadays videos are a smart and an effective tool to capture travelers' attention in the early customer journey. 11% of Norwegian travelers say that they have watched a travel related video and up to half of these video watchers say that videos have inspired them to think about planning a vacation or a new destination. 28% of those who watch videos say that videos have affected where they decide to go next. (TNS, 2017. Cited 21.3.2018). This suggests that Norwegians tend to use YouTube and other video sharing platforms to help with their decision-making process. Incorporating videos is something Ukkohalla should consider and focus on when planning and doing their online marketing.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two research methods that are commonly used in research studies: quantitative and qualitative research methods. Qualitative research method is a type of scientific research that seeks to understand a given research problem from the perspective of the population it involves. Qualitative research produces findings that are not determined beforehand, and it offers in-depth answers in textual form, whereas quantitative research method is usually based on a hypothesis about a certain phenomenon, it includes closed questions and the data gathered is in numerical form. (Patton, M. & Cochran, M. 2002. Cited 16.5.2018; Mack, N. & Woodsong, C. 2005. Cited 16.5.2018.)

The empirical research for this thesis was conducted in a form of an online survey combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A semi-structured survey was conducted, consisting of multiple-choice questions, open questions as well as open-ended multiple-choice questions to receive more detailed answers. The survey was carried out using online survey tool Webropol, which served as an easy answering platform for respondents as well as an analyzing tool for the author.

6.1 Data collection and sample size

Probability sampling technique was applied to gather the sample for the survey, which means that the sample was selected using random selection. Probability samples keep sampling error low and usually offer a sample that can be seen to be representative of the population (Greener, S. 2008, 48).

The survey was first sent via email to roughly a hundred official Norwegian sports organizations and clubs but despite the efforts, it unfortunately did not generate any answers. After noticing that contacting via email was not working, the organizations and clubs were contacted via Facebook and asked whether the survey could be posted to their page. A few answered, saying that they get a lot of same kind of enquiries, which is why they do not allow other people to post on their Facebook-pages. After this, there was no other choice but to start contacting the possible target group one by one. The survey was sent via Facebook messenger to around 200 sports university

students, graduates and personnel and luckily answers started to come in. One main page the author contacted people from was a Facebook-page of *Norwegian School of Sport Sciences*, as young sports enthusiasts are the target group of the events under research.

The online survey was open for two weeks for respondents to answer; from 23rd of April 2018 until 6th of May 2018. There was a total of 50 answers to the online survey, which is a rather small amount considering that enquiries were sent to around 300 organizations and individuals in total. This means that the response rate of the online survey was quite low as only one sixth answered the survey. However, even with a sample of this size it was easy to find common preferences and draw conclusions from the answers.

6.2 Survey

The objective of the survey was to find out if Norwegians have interest in participating in Swamp soccer or Snow soccer – World Championships and how to get them interested. In other words, the goal was to find out how to best attract possible new participants from Norway. Other goal was to examine which social media platforms they use, and which of these platforms would serve as the best digital marketing channels for Ukkohalla to connect with the Norwegians.

The respondents were asked to evaluate their attitudes, perceptions and reasons towards traveling and social media. The respondents were also asked about their viewpoints on social media marketing in tourism and if it affects their decision-making process when planning their holidays. It was also relevant to find out which social media platforms help them generate travel ideas or make travel plans and how important they think social media is when searching information about destinations. For the commissioner's point of view, it was also important to know if the customers preferred package holidays over independently implemented holidays and what kind of content customers would like to see about the events on social media. The respondents were also asked their opinion about today's trends in digital marketing in tourism in Norway.

It was necessary to keep the survey relatively short to ensure that as many respondents as possible would finish answering the survey. To motivate people to answer, all respondents had a chance to win a prize of their choosing by adding their personal information in the end of the survey: free participation for their team in Swamp soccer – World Championships held 13th-14th of July 2018, or

Wildwood Tales -book about magical stories of Finnish history. A total of 23 respondents took part in the competition. The prizes were agreed with the commissioner company.

The survey questions were formulated together with the commissioner company to ensure that all information from the survey would be beneficial for the company, and that the questions would be aligned with the theoretical framework of this thesis. In addition to multiple-choice questions, the survey included open questions and a few multiple-choice questions with open-ends to encourage the respondents to give more personal answers. This also helped the author to analyze the answers more in detail, which supported the reliability of the survey. The survey had 11 questions in total, of which two were open questions, and five multiple-choice questions had open-ends where respondents could add something in their own words. The survey was conducted in English, as it was assumed by the author that Norwegians are skilled in English language, which proved to be the case.

6.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability is another term for consistency and repeatability. Reliability is required of research studies and it means that when repeating the research, the results should stay the same despite for example the time, the researcher or the sample. Also, research should be transparent and clear enough for the reader to be convinced that the research method and the results are accurate. Another measure to assess a research study is validity, which refers to the extent to which the research is measuring what it was intended to measure. (Greener, S. 2008, 37.)

The survey questions were designed to be as neutral as possible yet descriptive enough to achieve reliability for the research. Also, the fact that all respondents were potential customers for Ukkohalla's special sports events was a positive factor to the reliability. In this research, using an online survey was the best option for implementing the empirical part of the research, as the author did not have the contacts needed for the survey beforehand. Also, conducting traditional interviews would probably have resulted in much fewer answers. The use of an online survey made it possible to gather larger amount of answers in a relatively short period of time. The results were diverse, and it was possible to draw interesting conclusions based on them.

However, as the research was conducted in the form of an online survey, there was no much control over the situation in which the participants answered the questions. Therefore, there was no guarantee that the survey questions were understood in the intended way, or that all answers were completely honest. It was also uncertain if the respondents had the needed knowledge over the subjects covered in the survey. The fact that the survey was conducted in English, might have affected to the answers as well.

Additionally, it should be noted that the sample may not give a perfectly accurate representation of all Norwegian sports enthusiasts due to the amount of answers, and the results may have varied with a different sample of people. The respondents were mainly students, graduates and personnel of *Norwegian School of Sports Sciences*, which affected the age distribution of the respondents. The university is located in Oslo area, which is why it could be assumed that most of the respondents were from southern part of Norway, and targeting different sample of people, for example from northern Norway, might have had an effect to the results.

The online survey and theoretical framework of this research supported each other, which increased the validity of the research. The questions of the survey were carefully planned to ensure that all information resulted from the survey would be beneficial for the company, and that the questions would be in line with the theory of this thesis. The structure of the survey was clear, and all questions had their own purpose in this research. The questions were accurate, and the answers give beneficial suggestions for the commissioner on how to develop their operations, which was the objective of this research. Additionally, the questions and the answers are comparable with the theoretical framework of this study.

7 RESULTS

Despite a rather small sample size, common preferences and conclusions could be drawn from the answers of the survey and the results will surely help the commissioner in the future. From the survey answers it can be concluded whether Norwegians are a potential customer group, how they prefer to implement their travels and from where they would like to get information about Finnish special sports events. The survey also helps Ukkohalla to figure in which social media platforms they should invest time in to best connect with the Norwegians and what are the current trends in digital marketing in tourism according to the respondents. The form of the online survey can be found from appendices.

7.1 Background information

To get a clearer picture of the respondents, it was necessary to get some background information of them. From the total of 50 respondents, 60 percent were males and 40 percent were females. From the research's point of view, it was also important to know in which age group they belonged in. *Figure 7.* below illustrates the age distribution of the respondents.

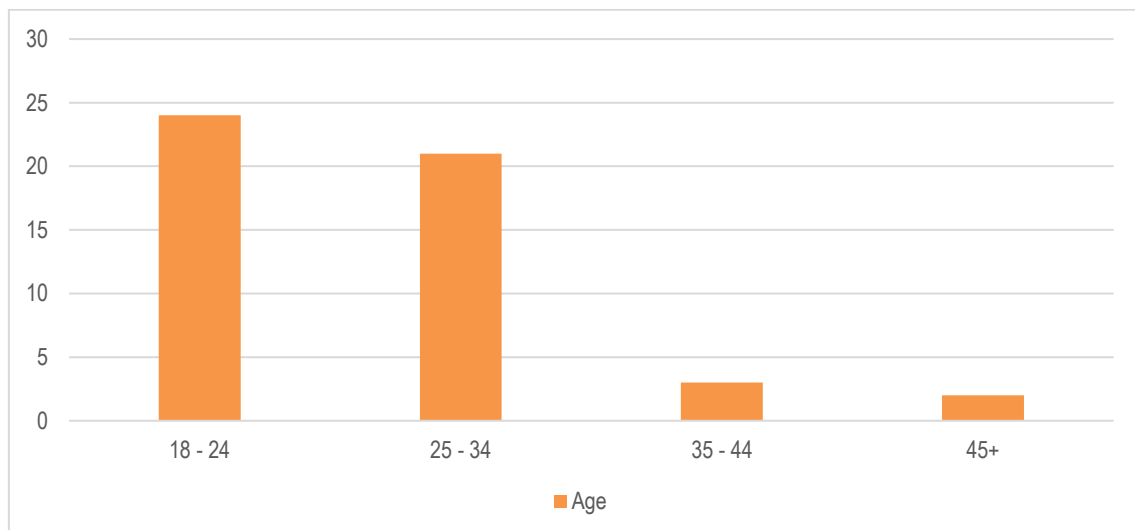


Figure 7. Age distribution

Most of the respondents were between the age of 18 and 24, with the age group of 25 – 34 also representing a significant share. From this it can be concluded that in terms of gender and age, the

respondents represent the target group of Ukkohalla's events as well as the customer segment presented in the theoretical background – the millennials.

In the third question the respondents were asked what their reasons were for traveling in general and out of all options, adventure was selected the most. The respondents could select several options, and other common reasons were relaxation, activities and culture, as seen in the *Figure 8.* below. This suggests that these respondents could be categorized as adventure travelers and therefore would be potential customers for the commissioner.

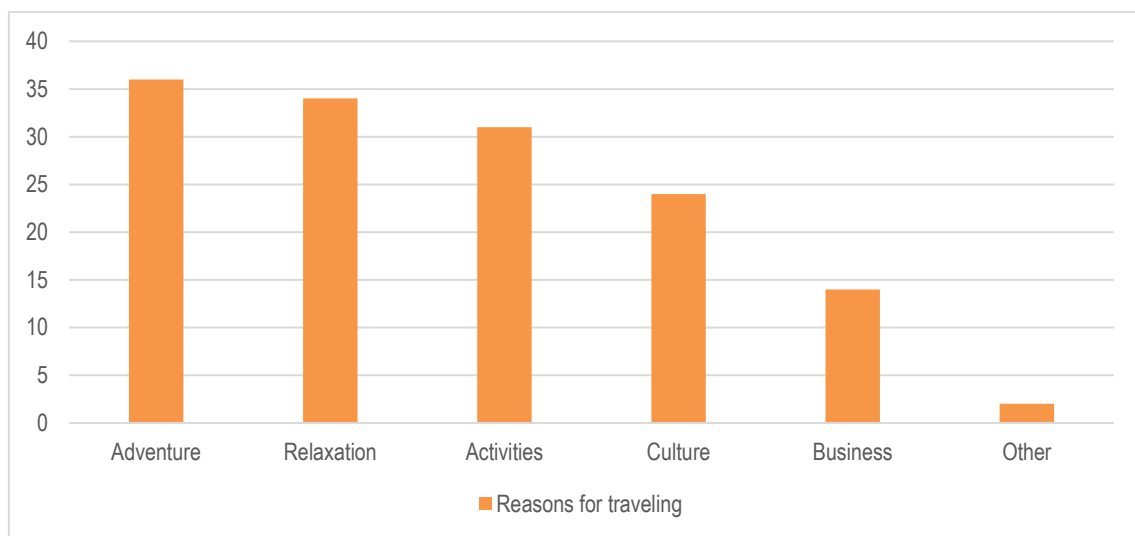


Figure 8. Reasons for traveling

Out of the all options for traveling reasons, business was selected the least and when asked if the respondents had other reasons, only football and family visits were stated as reasons for traveling in general. This is not quite comparable to VisitFinland's research (2016) that was referred to in the theoretical framework, where around half of the respondents stated business trips as their reason for traveling to Finland, and only fifth was stated as leisure trips. However, it should be noted that in the survey of this study the traveling reasons were asked in general, whereas in the study conducted by VisitFinland covered only Finland. Also, in this research the respondents were mainly young people, and with different sample of people the share of business trips may have been higher.

7.2 Perceptions towards Finland and the events

The main purpose of this thesis was to find out how to attract and to appeal to Norwegian customers, which is why the respondents were asked if they knew any special Finnish summer or winter sports events and if they were to travel to one, how would they like to implement the trip. When asked whether they had visited Finland or not, it turned out that 36 percent had visited Finland before and out of those who had not, 69 percent stated that they would like to. This also supports the fact that Norwegians are a potential customer group for any company operating in tourism industry in Finland.

Most respondents (34) did not know any special Finnish sports events but up to 16 respondents were able to state at least one Finnish sports event. The answers show that many Norwegians are not aware of Swamp soccer or Swamp soccer – World championships, as swamp soccer was only stated by one respondent. Special sports events that were known by several respondents included international orienteering competition Jukola, Wife carrying – World Championships and Sauna – World Championships. However, some of the answers only included the names of Finnish cities and therefore it is hard to conclude in which event they were implying to. All answers are listed below:

1. *Jukola*
2. *Lathi, Ruka, Kuopio, Kuusamo*
3. *Rally*
4. *Lahtispelen, Skijumping Kuusamo*
5. *Swamp football, Wife carrying – World Championships*
6. *Lahti*
7. *Sauna – World Championship*
8. *World Cup biathlon Kontiolahti, Cross-country Skiing Kuusamo*
9. *Wife carrying – World Championships*
10. *Finlandia cross-country skiing, Nuuksio Classic Trail Marathon, NUTS, Lapponia cross-country skiing, weird world championships*
11. *Sauna – World Championships*
12. *Jukola*
13. *Lahti cross-country skiing – World Championships*
14. *Redbull on ice*

15. *The skiing season opening and Challenge Turku -Triathlon*

16. *Jukola*

This suggests that Swamp soccer or Swamp soccer – World championships are rather unknown in Norway and some marketing operations should be made by Ukkohalla to gain the awareness of the events among Norwegians. In digital marketing it is vital to find and target the right audience to make the most of the marketing operations. In Ukkohalla's case it would be also important to highlight the fact that swamp soccer was originally invented in Hyrynsalmi, which is a major competitive advantage compared to other swamp soccer competitions arranged around the world.

In the sixth question the respondents were asked about their preferences of implementing their trip if they were to participate in some Finnish sports event. *Figure 9.* below shows that both package holidays and independently implemented trips were favored.



Figure 9. Preferences of implementing the trip

This was one of the most important results for the commissioner as this was one of the issues Ukkohalla needed answers to from their potential customers. From the results it can be concluded that Ukkohalla should offer both ways of participating to the events to please as many potential customers as possible. The respondents had also an option to choose "other" and suggest something in their own words, and one respondent answered, "together with friends", but it seems that the question might not have been understood correctly.

7.3 Social media behavior and opinions on digital marketing

Another important objective of this study was to find out which social media channels should be used as marketing tools to best connect with the Norwegians. Thus, the respondents were asked which social media platforms they use to help them generate travel ideas or make travel plans and how often. In the last questions of the survey they were asked what kind of content they would like to see about Finnish sports events and where they would market the events to best connect with the target group – the Norwegians. Also, their viewpoints on current trends in digital marketing in tourism in Norway were asked.

When asked how often the respondents use social media to help them make travel plans, over half, 66 percent, answered “sometimes”. 18 percent answered, “in most cases”, and both “always” and “never” were chosen by 8 percent of the respondents. This shows the importance of social media marketing in tourism and confirms that the commissioner should have a wide online presence to gain awareness of their business. The answer is also aligned with the theoretical background of this study as the millennials are in fact the biggest user group in social media in general.

The eighth question had eight social media platforms to choose from, with one open option where respondents could write something in their own words. Several options could be chosen by every respondent. The respondents were asked which social media platforms help them generate travel ideas or make travel plans and the results can be seen from *Figure 10*. below.

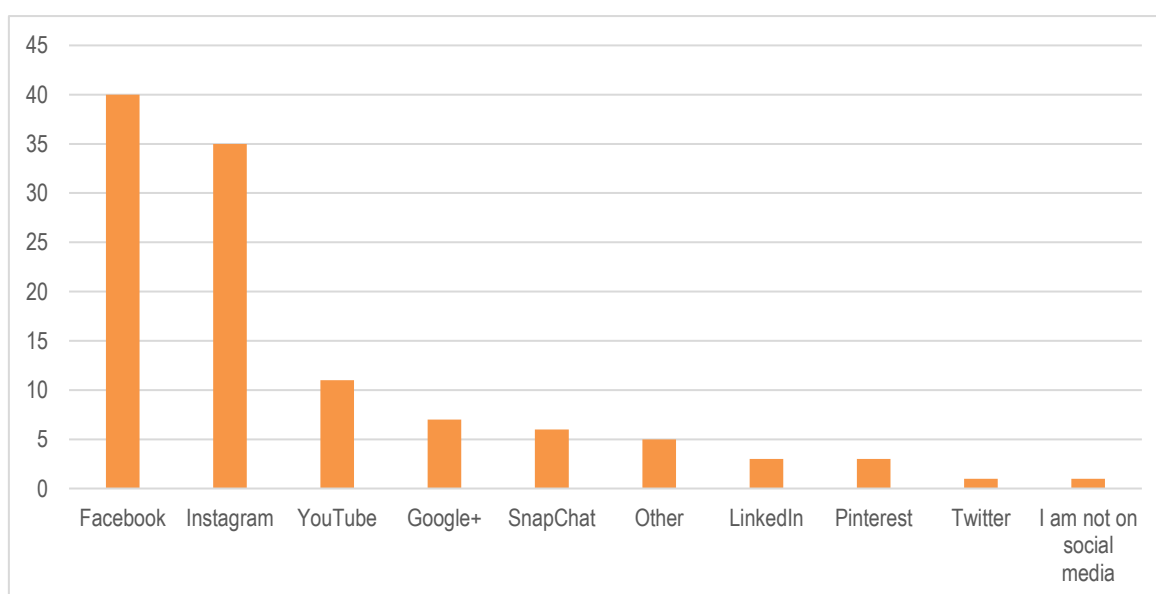


Figure 10. Social media platforms used when making travel plans

From the answers it can be concluded that three most used social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, which supports the findings in the theoretical framework. Other options chosen by several respondents were SnapChat, LinkedIn and Google+, and only one respondent stated that he or she is not on social media. The respondents could also add other platforms in option “other”, and all five answers are listed below:

- *Blogs*
- *Finn.no, Momondo.com, Hotels.com, TripAdvisor*
- *I don't use social media as inspiration*
- *None*
- *Blogs*

From the results of the question eight it can be concluded that to best connect with the Norwegians, Ukkohalla should focus their digital marketing operations on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. However, the answers can be misleading since these were platforms the respondents use in general to make travel plans, without focusing on the events under research.

To know how to appeal to and to attract Norwegian customers, the respondents were asked what kind of content they would like to see about Finnish sports events in social media. *Figure 11.* below shows that most of the respondents stated videos and pictures as important content, and 21 out of 50 stated that customer reviews should be also seen in social media. Again, respondents could give their own suggestions, but no answers were gotten to “other”.



Figure 11. Content preferences in social media

This confirms that Ukkohalla should focus in the contents of their social media accounts in form of high-quality videos and pictures. Also, reposting their customers' posts in their own Facebook and Instagram accounts would be an effective way to better connect with the customers and to personalize the marketing. Creating this kind of content can take a lot of time and money but in the tourism industry it is worth it in terms of acquiring new customers.

In the question ten, the respondents were put in the shoes of the commissioner company and asked where in social media they would market the events to best connect with Norwegians. The question was an open question, which meant that the respondents could answer totally in their own words. Despite the freedom of speech, common thread in the answers could easily be found. Two most stated social media platforms were Facebook (72%) and Instagram (60%). The third most common platform was SnapChat (10%), which shows how only two first mentioned platforms were kept in high relevance among Norwegians. Other platforms with a few answers included the following: blogs, YouTube, digital newspapers, email, direct inquiries and co-operating with Norwegian sports clubs and universities in social media.

Again, it can be concluded that Ukkohalla should focus in Facebook and Instagram as marketing platforms for their events. Having an up-to-date Facebook page is important and creating a Facebook event for all their events is an easy way to invite people to join and to gain awareness among all international customers. As stated in the theoretical framework of this study, Instagram has become one of the most used social media platforms around the whole world. Therefore, in addition to their four Instagram accounts, Ukkohalla should create own account for swamp soccer and snow soccer as well, or at least add pictures and videos of the sports to their already existing accounts. Reposting their customers' pictures and videos would be a good way to personalize their marketing and a way to emotionally connect with their customers. Whatever the content or the social media platform, it is also crucial to have all relevant information available at least in English.

In the last question the respondents were asked their opinions about current trends in digital marketing in tourism in Norway. To ensure that the question was understood correctly, a few examples of ways of digital marketing were listed after the question. The question was an open question, and again a few most commonly stated trends rose above the others, as seen from *Figure 12.* on page 38. The biggest trend according to the respondents was Facebook advertisements, and videos and events in Facebook were also included in the answer. The second most common answer was simply video content, as videos are seen pleasant to watch, for example compared to

reading a plain text about a destination. Videos also give a clearer picture for the customers about what the destination or an event are like.

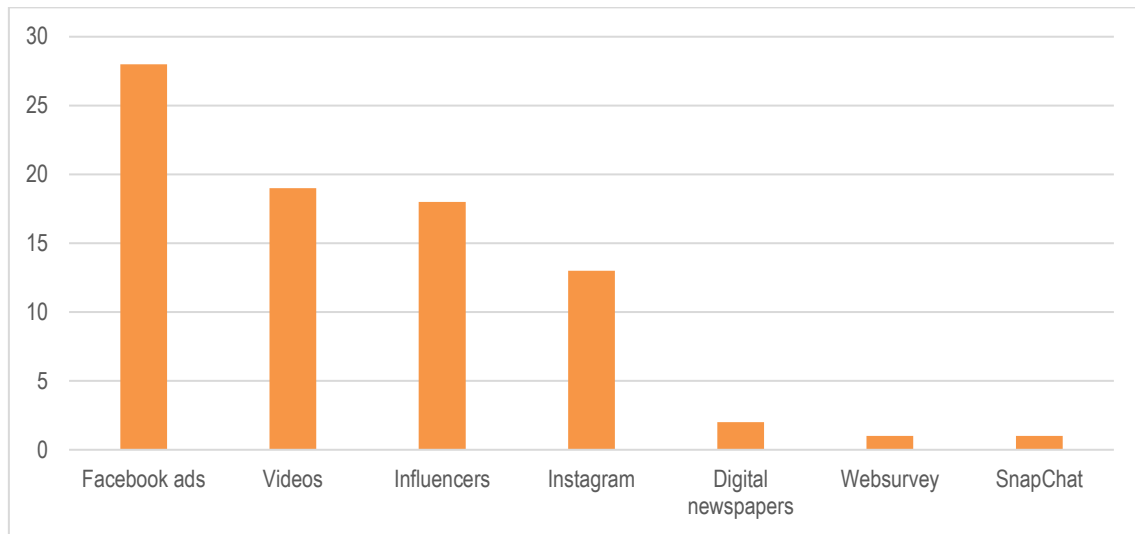


Figure 12. Current trends in digital marketing in tourism according to the respondents

Other trends in Norway, according to the respondents, include both private and paid Instagram posts, as well as using influencers in digital marketing. By influencers the respondents were referring to bloggers, as well as to Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat influencers. Other, single stated trends were web surveys, digital newspapers and a SnapChat account. However, the question was not understood by all the respondents as two answered “I don’t know”, and two respondents simply answered “advertising”.

Overall, the results from the last question are comparable with the theoretical framework of the thesis. Video content, paid Facebook advertisements and influencer marketing are current trends in digital marketing in tourism both around the world as well as in Norway. This suggests that the commissioner should focus their digital marketing resources to paid Facebook and Instagram advertisements, as well as to create high-quality video content for all social media platforms they are present. Using influencers, for example known sports enthusiasts, could also be something Ukkohalla should consider, as millennials is a customer group that is the most influenced by the opinions and recommendations of their peers. However, it should be noted that using influencers can be costly and therefore is not suitable option for all companies operating in tourism industry.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism industry around the world, and service providers in this industry are forced to adapt to the changes. Due to globalization and the development of new technologies, customers have become more demanding in terms of their wants and needs. Nowadays there is a high demand for experience-based holidays and in a highly competitive tourism industry, companies need to find ways on how to personalize their offerings and marketing. Digital marketing in tourism industry has become more important than traditional marketing, which is why it is crucial for all companies in tourism industry to have a wide online presence.

The main objective of this thesis was to find out how to attract and to connect to possible new participants from Norway as well as how the events should be implemented and marketed. The second purpose of this thesis was to find out which digital marketing channels would be the most beneficial in terms of attracting and connecting with the Norwegians. From these research problems, the research questions were formulated with the help of the commissioner to be as follows:

1. How to connect with and to attract possible new participants from Norway?
2. Which digital marketing channels to use as marketing tools?

The empirical research for this thesis was conducted in the form of a semi-structured online survey combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The survey was answered by 50 potential customers of the commissioner. Most of the respondents were between 18 and 24 years old and most could be described as adventure travelers, which supports the hypothesis that Norwegians are a good target group for the events. Also, 69 percent of the respondents who had not visited Finland before, stated that they would like to do so in the future.

The results from the survey show that both independent trips and package holidays were favored, which means that Ukkohalla should offer both ways of participating to the events to please and to attract as many Norwegian customers as possible. Also, the results show that Norwegian millennials use social media quite often when making their travel plans, and the most used platforms include Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. When asked where in social media the survey respondents would market the events if they were in Ukkohalla's shoes, Facebook and

Instagram were clearly the best platforms to reach and connect with Norwegians. Therefore, it would be beneficial for Ukkohalla to create their own Instagram account for the events or the sports, as well as make their *Swamp soccer* Facebook-page more user-friendly for international customers. The posts on Instagram and Swamp soccer Facebook-page could also be shared to Ukkohalla's resort Facebook-page to make the posts more visible. Additionally, creating a Facebook event for both events every year is an easy way to invite international customers to join. It is also crucial to keep all social media accounts up-to-date and have all relevant information available in English.

The results from the survey show that the biggest trends in digital marketing in tourism in Norway are paid Facebook advertisements, video content, private and paid Instagram advertisements, and using influencers in digital marketing. This suggests that to attract and to connect with Norwegian customers, Ukkohalla should focus their digital marketing resources on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube with high-quality videos and pictures, and using influencers in their marketing is also something they should consider in the future. Reposting their customers' pictures and videos for example in Facebook and Instagram would be a good way to personalize their digital marketing and a delightful way to connect with the customers. Additionally, due to algorithms filtering posts in Facebook and Instagram, paid advertisements would be an effective way to gain awareness among all international customers.

9 DISCUSSION

Overall, the whole thesis process was a pleasant experience, as the topic was interesting enough to keep the motivation on during the whole process. Also, my personal interest towards marketing and soccer affected positively to my motivation. During the process, I was lucky to participate to Snow soccer – World championships with my football team and I got the pleasure to experience the atmosphere of this unique sports competition and feel the sense of community with other adventure-loving people around and outside Finland. Additionally, participating helped me to understand the nature of both events.

Theoretical framework and the empirical research over the subject can be easily compared and overall, in my opinion, the study was successful as the main objectives were reached and the research questions were answered. I learned a lot about gathering and analyzing information from academic sources as well as applying the information to real life by conducting an online survey for the target group. Compared to the beginning of the process, the subjects covered in the theory have changed quite a lot, as during the process it became clearer what were the most important goals of this study and from what kind of results the commissioner would benefit the most. My informants from the commissioner company, the supervisor of the thesis, as well as my peer reviewers helped me a lot during the whole process and when formulating the final shape of the study.

However, there are some things that could have been done differently during the process. Factors affecting negatively to the process included the short time frame and the fact that email marketing did not work in this case. It was proven that email marketing is not so popular anymore as people have become more skeptical due to the amount of spams and scammers on the internet. However, it should be noted that contacting respondents through email by a company would have resulted in a different outcome. These factors caused unnecessary stress and hurry during the process but in the end, everything turned out just fine.

In the future it could be researched whether Ukkohalla's digital marketing operations were working and if the awareness of the events has increased among Norwegians. It could also be interesting to study this kind of research targeting different customer group for example from a different country. Additionally, to further develop the events and digital marketing it could be beneficial to

benchmark other similar events, such as Wife carrying – World Championships or Orienteering competition Jukola, as the results of the survey show that these events were known by Norwegian millennials.

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& Oulu University of Applied Sciences

1. How old are you? *

- ☐ 18 - 24
- ☐ 25 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 44
- ☐ 45+

2. Gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. In general, what are your reasons for traveling? *

- ☐ Activities
- ☐ Adventure
- ☐ Relaxation
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Culture
- ☐ Other, what?

4. Have you ever been to Finland? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No, but I would like to

5. Do you know any special Finnish summer/winter sports events or festivals? *

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, what?

6. If you were to travel to Finland to participate in some sports event or festival, how would you like to travel? *

- ☐ Independently
- ☐ Package holiday (accommodation, participation fee, food, etc. included)
- ☐ Other, what?

7. How often do you use social media to help you generate travel ideas or make travel plans? *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ In most cases
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

8. Which social media platforms help you generate travel ideas or make travel plans? *

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Other, what?
- ☐ I am not on social media

9. What kind of content would you like to see about Finnish sports events in social media? *

- ☐ Pictures
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ Customer reviews
- ☐ Other, what?

10. If you were an organizer of a Finnish adventurous sports events, where in social media would you market your events to best connect with Norwegians? *

11. In your opinion, what are the current trends in digital marketing in tourism in Norway? *

E.g. voice search, videos, using influencers/bloggers in marketing, paid Facebook ads, etc...

12. Please fill in your personal information if you want to have a chance to win 1) Free participation for your team in Swamp soccer - World Championships, held 13.-14.7.2018. or 2) Wildwood Tales -book about magical stories of Finnish history. Your information will only be used in the competition.

Name

Lastname

Mobile

Email

☐ I want to submit my answers

Hello Mrs./Ms.,

My name is Vivian Janné and I'm a student in Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland. I'm doing a bachelor's thesis about the following special sports events arranged every year in Finland: **Swamp soccer & Snow soccer - World Championships**. The target group for the events are 18 - 40+ -year-old sporty, adventurous people and in my study the target country was selected to be Norway. The aim is to find out how to connect and to attract more Norwegians to participate.

I am now conducting an online survey regarding these events and Norwegians' social media behavior and I was wondering if Your students/organization members would be willing to take a few minutes to answer the survey.

Link to the survey: <https://www.webpolsurveys.com/S/EDC4D8E841F03D51.par>

I would really appreciate if you could forward this email to those who might be interested. All answers are valuable!

Additionally, all respondents will have a chance to win a prize of their choosing:

1. Free participation for their team in Swamp soccer - World Championships 2018, held 13th - 14th of July 2018 (worth 250€).
2. Wildwood Tales -book, in English (worth 60€)

The winner will be informed personally.

Please see more about the events and the organizer:

<http://suopotkupallo.fi/in-english/>

<http://ukkohalla.fi/en/>

<https://www.facebook.com/swampsoccer/>

Tusen takk, og lykke til!

Med vennlig hilsen,

Vivian Janné

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n4javi00@students.oamk.fi

+358405744679

Degree Programme in International Business

Oulu University of Applied Sciences



Hei ---,

My name is Vivian Janné and I'm a BBA student in Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland. I'm doing a bachelor's thesis about special Finnish sports events and the target group for my study is Norwegian sports enthusiasts, which is why I'm conducting an online survey regarding the events and Norwegians' social media behavior.

I would really appreciate if you could take a few minutes to answer the survey. Here's the link:

<https://www.webpolsurveys.com/S/EDC4D8E841F03D51.par>

By filling in the survey you can also take part in the competition, more info about that in the survey.

Thank you so much! Tusen takk!